

The School Teacher and Sex Education

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School teachers who have become interested in the general field of sex education and in the work of social hygiene societies are inquiring, "What can we do to help?"

Teachers can help in various ways, as we shall see; but our first word must be one of caution.

CAUTION

Some teachers who make this inquiry have vague ideas of "introducing it into the schools." Some advocate direct and specific instruction in matters of sex and reproduction. Few realize the difficulties. They are aware of the emergency; they have an idea, possibly an exaggerated one, of what sex instruction can effect; they shun false modesty, and they are emboldened by the thought that any information they may impart will be less harmful than the misinformation already acquired by their pupils. It is true that an emergency exists. It is true that the wise imparting of information is important. It is true that false modesty has been a hindrance. It is true that wise instruction by the right person, at the right time, in the right quantity, and in the right spirit can do no harm and will really help. But it does not follow that teachers in general, nor self-appointed volunteers among them, are able immediately and without experience or preparation, and without proper textbooks, to introduce it into the schools or to teach it themselves; nor should they be permitted or authorized so to do.

The reasons for these conclusions are: First, most teachers lack the technical knowledge essential to the work; second, they lack training in the pedagogy of sex instruction.

ESTABLISHED PRINCIPLES

Teachers who are eager to take up this work will better understand what can and cannot be wisely done in the schools, if they

will remember and consider carefully the following well-established principles:

1. Parents ought to be the advisers of their children in these matters. Upon the parents should rest the main burden. No school can take a wise parent's place nor do for all children what parents ought to do.

2. A clear line of demarcation lies between what can and what cannot be done in the schools. There is a wide difference between personal, private counsel concerning the morals of the sex impulses (i.e., the attempt directly to control sexual behavior) on the one hand, and on the other hand, the teaching of elementary scientific facts of sex and reproduction in the organic world. The latter is a proper but limited field for work in schools; the former should not be treated except under special circumstances.

3. Such information on reproduction and the laws of sex as may properly be imparted by class instruction in the schools ought not to stand out separately but should be an organic part of courses in nature study, botany, zoology, and physiology. In fact, much of the information which might properly be conveyed to pupils in their classes may be given without the slightest consciousness on their part that what they are receiving is "sex information." The simplest facts of biology bear on our problem.

4. Such a program, even thus definitely limited, will require conservative experimenting. Experimenting of this sort can be attempted at any time, if properly authorized and safeguarded. The American Social Hygiene Association will furnish upon request information about successful attempts to teach the facts of sex in connection with the courses in biology. Normal schools must undertake the definite instruction and training of teachers.

Teachers should not attempt to "introduce sex hygiene into the schools" without authorization from superintendents, and school authorities should not undertake to direct such work without taking counsel of experts in the field of education.

UNREASONED CONSERVATISM NOT DESIRABLE

While we urge conservatism, we deprecate unreasoned conservatism. Inasmuch as probably 90 per cent. of parents do not advise their children of the facts in an accurate, timely and whole-

some way, someone else ought to take the place of the parent, until a new generation of parents has been educated. We can hope for little from the parents of the next generation, unless the children (who are to be the future parents) are given the facts in the schools.

A FURTHER WORD OF CAUTION

It may be asked whether teachers may not wisely give occasional "talks" to the boys or to the girls. Again we must urge caution.

We know of no subject in which otherwise fairly intelligent people are more likely to mistake a little knowledge for adequate knowledge, or even ignorance for intelligence, than in this subject of sex education. It is true that an exact knowledge of the facts is of fundamental importance, and yet it is also true that there is no department of education in which pedagogy is more nearly of the essence of the subject. Furthermore, there are divergent ethical views, some of which lead to harmful consequences. Women teachers, as a rule, are incapable of dealing directly with boys. They are, as a rule, under misconception of a boy's sex life.

And yet it may be asked: Does it not become the duty of a teacher occasionally to try to meet the need of individual pupils? Yes; with qualifications. If a teacher suspects that a boy or girl needs special counsel, the teacher should get into touch with the parents. If the parents are helpless, then (with the parents' consent) the teacher may consult the family priest, minister or rabbi. If there is no help in these directions, efforts should be made by teacher with pupil—woman teacher for girls, man teacher for boys.

WHAT TEACHERS MAY WISELY DO

After these words of caution, the gist of which is that teachers ought not to undertake direct sex instruction or counsel, without special pedagogical training and proper authorization, we may put down briefly what teachers may wisely do.

1. *Moral Training.* Even teachers who give little or no direct sex instruction may take a part in something of vastly greater importance—the pupils' moral training. Every teacher should take to heart earnestly the fact that everything that helps to build up a pupil's character, does more than anything else that can be done

in school. This must come from teacher to pupil, not so much from formal and official acts, as by the daily influences of the teacher's own sympathy, honesty and spirit.

A thoroughly honest boy or a genuinely modest girl, ignorant of sex facts, is safer than a dishonest boy or a challenging girl, primed with the latest information. And with a true teacher, many a school lesson can itself, by its implications, be made a lesson in honesty and other fundamental virtues. Moreover, teachers can, by wise suggestion and example, do much to prevent the reading of worthless books. If teachers will read to their pupils from the best books and help to get such books into their pupils' hands, they will bring to bear an incalculable power for good.

2. *Physical Regimen.* Along with the pupil's moral education, in which every teacher has a share, we must consider the pupil's physical training. Every well-prepared teacher ought to be able to influence pupils in their general physical regimen. It is difficult here, as in the moral training, to overcome unhealthful home customs; yet much can be done. The teacher can everywhere do his part to see that all the pupils get play and exercise. He can guard against the increasing evils of physical exercise by proxy—by which we mean an excess of rooting on the side lines, while picked groups sometimes play harder than is good for them. Teachers can insist on ventilation, remembering that patent ventilating apparatus, no matter what the cost, was made for pupils, not pupils for the ventilating system. Teachers can give unexaggerated, wholesome, scientific information concerning tea, coffee, tobacco, and alcohol, excessive and irregular eating, unwholesome foods, injurious clothing, and late and irregular hours.

3. *Reaching Parents.* Since parents ought to instruct their children and do not know how, one thing to do is to get them together that they may be taught how. The success of such meetings depends largely upon the coöperation of principals and teachers with those who are undertaking this work in various communities. Whenever such meetings are being arranged, teachers ought to make special personal effort to procure the presence at the meetings of those parents whose children seem less carefully nurtured. In communities where the work is new, field secretaries and other officers of the local social hygiene societies will help teachers in arranging parents' meetings.

4. *Emergency Measures.* The fact that everywhere boys and girls, thirteen or fourteen years of age and older, are leaving our grammar and high schools and going into the world ignorant of the consequences of sexual experiences, constitutes an emergency that no right-minded person can contemplate without stress of heart and conscience. These boys and girls have not been taught by their parents nor have they received instruction in school. They have been taught only by each other and in evil ways.

Much harm may be averted and much good done by talks for older boys given by carefully selected men and talks for older girls by carefully selected women speakers. Further information with reference to the organization of meetings and the selection of speakers may be procured at any time by writing to the American Social Hygiene Association, 105 West 40th Street, New York.